LESSON PLAN

Russian Culture through Art: Understanding Women’s Lives

Featuring Konstantin Egorovich Makovsky
Created by Tatyana Novikov, Professor of Russian Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, tnovikov@unomaha.edu
Grade Level Elementary

Overview
Russian art opens up a fascinating world of history and culture. This lesson offers the audience an invitation to share and experience these events by presenting the artwork of Konstantin Makovsky, a Russian nineteenth century painter, who was famous for his portraits of women in Russian national costumes. An examination of Makovsky's paintings will allow the audience to explore the history of women in Russia, and to learn about the historical status of women and their social, cultural, and intellectual influence on Russian society.

Anticipatory Set
• Konstantin Makovsky was a master history painter, with many of his painting depicting an idealized view of Russian life prior to Peter the Great's modernization of Russia. Today, his portraits are some of his most recognized and sought after works.
• Makovsky's painting Russian Beauty with a Cat (1865) is a favorite of many who visit The Joslyn Art Museum.
• Students will be asked to define the portrait as a kind of painting. In Makovsky's time only painters with a great deal of skill could make portraits come to life as he did.
• We will discuss Makovsky's original composition, attention to detail, the realistic depiction of the subject's costume, and the decorative elements of the painting's background.

Objectives
• Students will learn to examine a portrait
• Students will learn to recognize elements of the Russian national costume and lifestyle
• Students will investigate the peculiarities of Makovsky's art
• Students will explore other paintings by Makovsky and get important insights into Russian women's history

Resources
• Konstantin Makovsky – http://www.wikiart.org/en/konstantin-makovsky#close
• Joslyn's Makovsky Teaching Poster & powerpoint presentation - http://goo.gl/vGm2lH

Lesson Outline

Viewing and examining K. Makovsky's Russian Beauty and Cat (Group activity, 15 minutes)
1. Discussing a Russian national costume is depicted in the painting
2. How does the painting (the costume and the surroundings) reflect the subject's social status?
3. Exploring the ethnic details of the painting's background and the decorative elements used in the depiction of the house.
4. What makes this portrait so attractive and magical? Why do you feel so close to the girl?
5. What aspects of the painting highlight the beauty of the subject?
LESSON PLAN

Women in Russia (16th-17th centuries): Exploring K. Makovsky's art (power point presentation and discussion of paintings, 45 minutes)

1. Medieval Russian marriage. Discussion of engagement and wedding customs. Family dynamics. The ideal Russian wife as promoted by Russian Orthodox teachings. Why was the wedding not exciting but sad and upsetting for Russian women?

**Paintings by Makovsky**: *Boyar's Wedding Feast, The Russian Bride's Attire, Boyaryshnya*

2. The view of the Russian Orthodox church on women's role in the family and society.

**Paintings by Makovsky**: *Woman Spinning Thread, Woman Making Lace*

3. *Terem* – seclusion of aristocratic women in their homes; seclusion as a mark of honor. *Terem* is attributed to the growth of misogyny as suggested by the Orthodox church.

**Paintings by Makovsky**: *The Boyarina, Boyarina by the Window, The Russian Bride's Attire*


**Paintings by Makovsky**: *From the Everyday Life of the Russian Boyar in the Late XII century, Portrait of a Girl, Woman in a Russian Dress, Girl with a Sheaf, A Goblet with Mead*

5. How did the Russian national costume style develop? What did it represent?

**Paintings by Makovsky**: *Portrait of Zinada Yusupova; Russian Beauty with Kokoshnik, A Girl in a National Costume, A Young Boyarina, Russian Beauty Wearing a Kokoshnik*

6. Did the Russian society value women highly?

**Academic Standards**
Available on online version at [www.joslyn.org/education/teachers/](http://www.joslyn.org/education/teachers/) [select Lesson Plans, then European]

**About the Artwork**
Best known as a painter of peasant scenes and founding member of the revolutionary movement known as the "Wanderers," Makovsky established himself early on as a champion of Russian subject matter. Entering the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg — the only avenue for aspiring artists in the tightly controlled Czarist state — in 1858, Makovsky took an active part in an unprecedented rebellion against the authorities in 1863 and, with thirteen other students, formed the Artel' Khudozhnikov, an independent artists' cooperative. The Artel' advocated freedom from Academic rules and subject matter and saw themselves as part of a new moral and rational order.

*Russian Beauty and Cat* perfectly embodies the modified realism and dawning nationalism of mid-century Russian artists. A carefully painted Tartar woman leans out an ornately carved window frame. The elaborate jewelry of her adornments contrasts with the softness of her face and bare shoulders —slightly sensual note accentuated by the contented, purring cat that she strokes.

**IMAGE**: Konstantin Makovsky, (Russian, 1839–1915), *Russian Beauty and Cat*, 1865, oil on canvas, 45 1/4 x 36 1/2 in., Joslyn Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Martin, 1954.172